

Same Mind, Same Love, Same Joy (Part 4)

Philippians 1:27-2:4

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A simplistic view of the effect of working together is illustrated by a common type of algebra problem. If one person takes one hour to clean the kitchen and someone else takes 30 minutes, then together they should finish in 20 minutes. This assumes a simple additive effect of two people working independently, without any effects of their interaction or cooperation. A more complex and realistic example is that of rowing, where the speed of the boat is not determined by the cumulative strengths of the individual rowers but relies heavily on the degree to which they row in unison. The body of Christ is more like rowing than like the algebra problem. We are effective when we work in unison and harmony with one purpose. Last week in Philippians 1:12-26 we learned that we all must be focused on the progress of the gospel. And this week we will see that this progress is accomplished not only through proclamation but also when we live our lives together in unity.

In today's passage we see that unity has three aspects. The first is that it sets us apart as citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven. In v. 27 Paul says to have a manner of life worthy of the gospel. Here he doesn't use the usual word *peripateo* (to walk), but rather uses the word *politeuomai*, which means to conduct one's life as a citizen (the prefix *poli-* meaning city). We should live lives that are worthy of and in accordance with our citizenship in the kingdom of heaven rather than in accordance with the world. And being united in our identity and citizenship, we can help each other live accordingly. When we strive together as one for the gospel, it enables us to stand firm in spirit, without being afraid of opposition from the world (vv. 27-28). There is strength in numbers. During this pandemic, let us not get too used to our isolation. Though having church online is convenient, it isn't the way church is meant to be. Let's long to meet together. Even now let's try to find ways to be united.

Second, unity comes from being bound together through the Trinity. Occasionally, Paul drops references to the Trinity (e.g. 2 Corinthians 13:14), and although it's harder to notice because of the chapter break, Paul also does the same thing here in 1:28 (mentioning God the Father) and 2:1 (mentioning the Son and the Spirit). We have been saved by God, we have encouragement in Christ, and participation in the Spirit. We are united with each other through unity with God. We are all God's children, in the body of Christ, with the same Spirit in us. We

share in this deep relationship with God, who is, using the analogy of rowing, the star rower, the captain of our team, and the coxswain who coordinates the rowers. Members of churches that are attended by a celebrity tend to gravitate towards this celebrity. How much more should we gravitate to the God of the universe, who brings us together in relationship to Him. We share in our love for Him. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit pull us together in unity, so we can stand firm with the same purpose and same mind.

Third, unity comes as a natural result of humility. In 2:2 Paul exhorts the Philippians to be united in their mind, in their love, in the Spirit, and again in their mind. Note that he mentions sharing the same mind twice for emphasis. So if we have one mind, what kind of mind is it we should have? In vv. 3-4 we see that we should all share a humble mind, one that regards others as above ourselves and that puts their interests and benefit before our own. This is the example that Jesus set for us. This is the mind of Christ. We should put other's preferences, opinions, feelings, and well-being before our own. It's easy to understand but hard to do. Even those who are most disciplined in following rules struggle with this. A simple example of putting other's preferences first is that every Monday in our family we alternate who gets to pick which restaurant we will order take-out from, and nobody is allowed to complain. We may be disappointed with the food, but it forces us to put someone else's preference first. In church, putting others first means coming to church with the desire to meet someone's need. If everyone comes looking to fulfill someone else's need rather than just their own, then everyone's needs will be met. This is the power of humility. We can only have this experience as a community, not in isolation. So let us pray that God will enable us to be humble so that we can be united, striving together as the body of Christ.